

The Builder.

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ALTHOUGH the session is yet very young, several matters connected with our specialties have been brought forward in Parliament, and should not be lost sight of by our readers. On the 4th inst. in answer to a question by Mr. Osborne, as to the intended course in regard to the Metropolitan Buildings Bill laid on the table at the close of last session (and reviewed by us at the time), Lord Seymour (first Commissioner of Works and Buildings) said he had brought in the Bill with the view of obtaining opinions regarding it; and he meant again to introduce it in the present session, in order to its being referred to a committee, with the view of obtaining such information as was not to be procured in any other way. It seems strange that this should be necessary, after the many attempts that have been made: still by the means proposed (if the evidence be of the right sort, and ample,) the materials will be collected, out of which, in practical hands, a practicable Bill may be constructed. Even if this be done, as many persons qualified to afford valuable suggestions will have no opportunity of doing so before the proposed committee, or be unwilling to expose themselves to the annoyance of cross-examination and badgering; and as those who will be called to do so, however skilful and judicious, cannot be expected to represent all the experience and wisdom capable of being brought to bear on the subject; it behoves all who are in any way interested, directly or collaterally, as much as in them lies, to address themselves to its consideration, and contribute their practical deductions for the common good; to the end that a statute be obtained which shall protect the lieges, obviate official abuses, clear up legal and technical ambiguities, and withhold offer no obstructions to the progress of art, and harass or trammel as little as may be private judgment and enterprise. It might even be a consideration how far the fact that any Buildings Bill, like all man's "best laid schemes," must still be but an imperfect work (the more especially seeing the rapid strides of constructive science, which is constantly liable to render obsolete in a day our pet formulae, and thus to invoke fresh amendments), should prompt the institution of a permanent Court, not merely to carry out the letter of the law, but, having that as its basis, invested with discretionary powers, rendered safe by diffusion amongst a body elected by the united voice of proprietors, architects, and builders.

The Master Carpenters' Society have met several times on the subject, and have discussed the propriety of presenting petitions against the Law Court proposed to be established by Lord Seymour's Bill, with its dangerously arbitrary powers, and praying that the Bill to be brought in may be limited to enforcing incombustible walls and roof-covering, and that the district surveyors be remunerated by a fixed salary instead of fees. That previous Buildings Acts for the metropolis

have produced confined and miserable houses for the working classes, and have failed to ensure sounder construction than is found in places where there are no legislative enactments on the subject, is certain; but the possibility of narrowing the Act to the limits mentioned is not at first sight obvious: of this hereafter. The aspect of affairs in the present Metropolitan Buildings Court has not improved. The referees and the registrar, unfortunately, still "agree to differ," and much obstruction is necessarily the result. A rule has been obtained in the Bail Court to show cause why the referees should not be compelled to adjudicate upon a requisition sent to them relative to the erection of what was Moufflet's Tavern, on Knightsbridge-green. When this matter is argued, some of the results of these differences will probably be shown. Our business, however, is not with them just now, but with Parliament.

On the same evening it was stated that the Corporation of London had undertaken the formation of a new metropolitan cattle market, in place of Smithfield.

Directly after, came complaints as to the ventilation of the New House of Commons, and Mr. Hume made an attack on the stained glass windows and the metal work. As a sequence, Dr. Reid was called to the bar of the House on the 6th, when he threw the whole blame on Mr. Barry, maintaining that, although deputed to ventilate the house, obstructions were thrown in his way, so that he could not possibly effect it.

"The interior of the house," said he, "is subject to currents of air from every side, that blow hot one moment and cold the next. On the first evening that the House met doors were torn off in some passages leading to the house, from which gusts of air came into the house from every side. You might as well ask me to regulate the winds and currents of the Bay of Biscay, as expect me to ventilate the house if the doors and windows of the entrances leading to the house are not placed under my control. The second difficulty is, that there are numberless chimneys surrounding the house, which poison the atmosphere by the carbonic acid they send forth. There are torrents of smoke coming into the house and its approaches from these chimneys, so that the house stands in an atmosphere of carbonic acid. The next condition is, that the lights in and about the house should be placed under such limitations as should permit of due ventilation. I appeal to any member who will go into the corridor; there are eight doors leading into it, and not a light in it is ventilated. It is like sitting here above a gas-lamp."

For 7,000*l.* Dr. Reid said he would undertake "to build, warm, and ventilate a chamber for the Commons which would hold all the members, and allow them to see each other," and would relieve them from their principal annoyances in the present House.

On the 11th the matter was again brought forward, when the House authorised Dr. Reid to make such temporary improvements as he thought necessary. The tone of Dr. Reid's remarks was unjustifiable. We are informed on good authority that every requisition he made, with the exception of the removal of the paint on the floor, which the Commissioners of Works would not sanction, was attended to; and that the drains complained of by him were put in by his own men from his own drawings.

There have been many mistakes made in this matter, much mismanagement and bad feeling shown on one side or the other, and it is quite time that further waste of money should be stopped. We are unable to recognise the difficulty said to exist in ventilating

such a chamber, when money is no object, and provision for it contemplated *ab initio*. It will scarcely be believed when we say, that 58,000*l.* have already been spent on the ventilation of the new House of Commons, and that a staff, costing, we are told, 1,300*l.* a year, is engaged to work it.

We must, at the same time, take the liberty of begging members of the House to be a little patient and reasonable, and to give new arrangements a fair trial. The inconsiderate way (if it be not a breach of privilege to say so), in which they rushed into an expenditure of thousands last session for the alteration of an untried house, might lead some to doubt gravely both their sagacity and prudence.

We may add here in parenthesis, that on the 11th her Majesty was pleased to confer the honour of knighthood on Mr. Barry.

Before the ventilating discussion took place, Lord Seymour obtained leave to bring in one Bill to regulate the supply of water to the metropolis; and Mr. Mowatt another, with the same end in view, adding to it the improvement of the drainage.

Lord Seymour said that he thought the Thames water beyond the tidal influence would be found a fit source of supply. He was opposed to the course recommended by the Board of Health, that of going to the sands of Surrey for a supply; did not think that the supply of water should be left to Government, but to private enterprise; that these works would be carried out with more efficiency and more economy by companies than by municipal corporations, which would be always liable to be guided by questions of expediency instead of purely by the real objects to be accomplished, namely, that of protecting the consumer from bad water, from an insufficient supply, and from extravagant charges, and that the Bill he would bring in would simply control; he thought that the source of the supply should be under the inspection of the Government, that the supply should be ample, that means for filtering the water should be provided, that the reservoirs should be covered, and that the rate of charge should be under the control of Parliament.

Mr. Mowatt said his Bill would be essentially a ratepayers' Bill. He proposed that the metropolis should be divided into seventeen distinct districts; in each district the ratepayers should have the power of electing district commissioners for the administration of affairs; that these two matters, namely, the water supply and the drainage, should be under the direction and control of such district commission; that these commissioners should have the power to elect out of their own body a given number of persons to act as special commissioners in respect to the water supply and drainage; that in addition to those special commissioners the Government should associate four other commissioners—one to represent the Woods and Forests, as the Crown property might be affected, another to represent the Poor-law Board, and the other two to represent other boards more especially under the control of the Government; in other words, he proposed that the Government should have a voice in the working of this commission. He thought that water was not a fit subject to be dealt with by a trading company. He would leave the commissioners to settle the source, and would give them the power of rating the metropolis for any sum